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Issue 5.2 (Fall 2016) – Leveraging Justice

Introduction

Janelle Reinelt and María Estrada-Fuentes

ABSTRACT This special issue explores how best to use performance to leverage justice for victims of trafficking, child soldiers, illegal immigrants, the poor, and others who lack recognition and protection within the legal and social apparatus of national governments and some non-governmental organizations (NGOs). This focus has emerged from a two-year research project on "Gendered Citizenship: Manifestations and Performance" between scholars in theatre and performance in collaboration with politics colleagues at University of Warwick, UK and Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi.

Political responsibility is not about doing something by myself, however, it is about exhorting others to join me in collective action. —Iris Marion Young¹

Following up on [Lateral 5.1](#), which examined the stakes of cultural studies and urged the field to "be imagined into the future as deliberately politicized work,"² this special issue explores how best to use performance to leverage justice for victims of trafficking, child soldiers, undocumented immigrants, the poor, and others who lack recognition and protection within the legal and social apparatus of national governments and some non-governmental organizations (NGOs). This focus has emerged from a two-year research project on "Gendered Citizenship: Manifestations and Performance" between scholars in theatre and performance in collaboration with politics colleagues at University of Warwick, UK and Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi.³ We also reached out to like-minded US and Dutch authors to complete this issue.

We probe three critical overlapping arenas of effort to leverage justice: state agencies and NGOs providing support services and recovery programs to survivors; the policy arena where legislation and program designs originate; and representations of victims/survivors' experiences appearing in theatre, media, or other public venues. Of key concern is an analysis of how these practices interrelate to secure justice (or not) for target groups.

Performance resonates through several layers of this topic. The exploited themselves perform: first for their abusers, then later for their sponsors (e.g., funders, agencies, state agents). Attempts to aid survivors can incorporate performance as a therapy (such as Dance Movement Therapy with trafficked persons), and a number of performance groups create work in order to make visible the plight of the exploited and give voice to the silenced, using performance as a form of activism. However, the ethico-political problems entailed in these performances can be substantial: certain types can be coercive, unproductive, or even reproduce aspects of the original exploitation. Absence of a plurality of performances or alternative types of performance may in some cases diminish or impede justice. Organizations or agencies are often caught between their goals of aiding survivors and the legal, financial, or structural pressures under which they operate. Seeking justice for victims through performance thus entails a fluctuating proportion of costs and benefits which must be weighed.

To “leverage” justice is to invoke a metaphor that suggests multiple meanings: (1) to put pressure on existing systems and organizations in order to secure justice; (2) to employ “justice” as an organizing concept to influence public opinion, state legislation, and political action; or (3) to engage with an analysis of weights: as the “scales of justice” weigh the balance of competing elements of grievance, injury, responsibility, and redress to respond to the complexities of context and action, leveraging is an intentional ‘weighing and weighting’ of some persuasive and determining actions, arguments, or performances. Framing the issue through Iris Marion Young’s social connection model of global responsibility, the issue asks with her, “how shall agents, both individual and organizational, think about our responsibility in relation to structural injustice?”⁴

Here are some of the key questions that emerge in this issue:

- What contribution can performance make to public knowledge of, legal support for, and policy priorities regarding structural violence against women, children, and other vulnerable persons across a range of predicaments from poverty to trafficking?
- How do the complexities of different nation states and cultures complicate attempts to define the issues?
- What ethical considerations govern issues of witnessing and representation of survivors in artistic work? In public journalism or media?
- When artists work with these fragile and injured subjects, what protections are needed to ensure their privacy/security/dignity?
- When performances representing real events or situations circulate in the public domain, what problems emerge for the subjects and the performers?
- How do organizations negotiate the neoliberal market demands of governments and funding bodies to produce clear narratives of victimization and outcomes of survival success without compromising the often complex and ambiguous truths?
- How “joined up” are these questions for artists, scholars, and groups working on different specific issues (i.e. trafficking, homelessness, migration, child soldiers, domestic service exploitation, asylum)?

The materials collected here speak to each other in a variety of ways, and we hope readers will juxtapose the accounts they encounter to produce their own acts of leveraging. For example, the role of public memory and the redress it might offer is explored in relation to state systems of welfare for the poor in [Jenny Hughes and Carran Waterfield](#)’s contribution, which can be put in useful conversation with [Sofie deSmet and Marieke Breyne](#)’s essay on performances of grief and commemoration of the Marikana massacre in South Africa, and also with [Silvija Jestrovic](#)’s investigative elegy for a missing Indian domestic worker.

All three of their discussions stress the role of the body in making these memories, and here they link up with a number of other contributors who examine the political weight of embodied expression through surrogate bodies, e.g. [Analola Santana](#), as well as verbatim or auto-biographical self-representations ([Jimmy Noriega](#) and [Maggie Inchley](#)). These pieces, in turn, circle back to Hughes and Waterfield, where Carran can be seen to stand in for her “Nana-in-hospital” and other members of her family, as well as for all poor women in the “Paupers’ Concert.” [Emma Cox](#)’s analysis of the coding of queer bodies seeking asylum highlights choices made about the role of the body and how to represent it under deep surveillance. The body also figures substantively in all the contributions that focus on human trafficking and child soldiering, from descriptions of policy debates and policy implementation, to movement therapy as an approach to trauma ([Janelle Reinelt](#), [María Estrada-Fuentes](#), [Urmimala Sarkar Munsri](#)). The politics of theatrical fictions in [Debra Castillo](#)’s trafficking essay extend and enrich this investigation of body aesthetics.

[Anupama Roy](#) has written widely on gendered citizenship in the Indian context. She was an important interlocutor throughout our project, and we are pleased to include her contribution in audio-essay form. “Polyrhythmic Citizenship” investigates the intelligibility of the concept of citizenship across different contexts, using music as analogy to explain how plurality can connect cultures across time without the claim to universality that so often accompanies theories of citizenship. Her engagement with leveraging justice takes place at the moment of Indian independence and in Delhi 2012 at the time of the public outcry over the gang rape of Jyoti Singh.

We complete the main part of this issue with “[Delhi Dispatches](#).” Here, we bring our readers two blog entries responding to the recent unrest at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) where state intervention by police and detention of students has been compounded by a hostile academic administration. The ongoing struggle of our JNU colleagues and students to challenge right-wing hyper-nationalism and to uphold academic freedom concludes the section with a demonstration of leveraging justice through direct activism.

We also wanted to include what we’ve learned working with two NGOs that use art practices to help trafficking survivors recover, and also to highlight several other activist practices that we have encountered in our work. To that end, we have included an “[Appendix](#)” (although in an online source that is less linear in navigation than a print volume, this may seem a bit quaint!). The Appendix brings together an interview with Sohini Chakraborty, Director of Kolkata Sanved, about the history and practice of the NGO with two annotated slide shows, one from Sanved, and one from California-based ARM of Care. These two presentations are used by the organizations to educate the public about trafficking and about the role of movement and art in working with victims of trauma, building survival skills. We think that “leveraging” is a useful concept in this kind of work as practitioners search for the best ways to speak to the general public and also to funders and state agencies to whom they are sometimes responsible.

We have wanted to take advantage of all the technical possibilities of online publication that *Lateral* offers and are therefore pleased to include two photo essays, a link to an audio lecture, and the two annotated slide shows—in addition to a lot of visual material in support of the other pieces. We hope these features will enrich your experience and lead you to creatively weigh the perspectives and options you will be seeing, hearing, and reading about. There are some tensions among these materials as well as some striking convergences, and we hope you will be provoked to imagine alternatives as you weigh up the options and choices on offer to decide for yourselves how best to leverage justice.

In lieu of a Table of Contents (since these contributions form a web of associations more than a linear order), we have included these editors’ notes at the beginning of the issue, suggesting what other pieces within the issue could be productively considered together.

Notes

1. Iris Marion Young, *Responsibility for Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 93. [↗](#)
2. Stefanie A. Jones, Eero Laine, and Chris Alen Sula, “Editors’ Introduction: Disciplinary Stakes for Cultural Studies Today,” *Lateral* 5, no. 1 (2016), <http://csalateral.org/wp/issue/5-1/introduction-disciplinary-stakes-cultural-studies-today/>. [↗](#)
3. Gendered Citizenship: Manifestations and Performance was a two-year project involving roughly equal numbers of faculty and graduate students from Warwick and JNU, and included selected other UK and Indian colleagues as well, totaling about

twenty participants. It was funded by UKIERI (UK-India Education and Research Commission, UK), and UGC (University Grants Commission, India) on their "Thematic Partnership" scheme, with additional support from both universities. It ran from 2014–2016. A collection of essays under the project name will be published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2017, edited by Bishnupriya Dutt, Janelle Reinelt, and Shrinkhla Sahai. For more information on the project, visit the website <https://genderedcitizenshipandperformance.wordpress.com>. ↗

4. Young, 95. ↗

 [Bio](#)

Janelle Reinelt

Janelle Reinelt is Emeritus Professor of Theatre and Performance at University of Warwick. Her recent books include *The Grammar of Politics and Performance*, edited with Shirin Rai (2014), and *The Political Theatre of David Edgar: Negotiation and Retrieval* (2011) with Gerald Hewitt. She was President of the International Federation for Theatre Research from 2004-2007, and received the Distinguished Scholar Award from the American Society for Theatre Research in 2010. She has been co-PI with Bishnupriya Dutt on the Gendered Citizenship: Manifestations and Performance research project.

 [Bio](#)

María Estrada-Fuentes

María Estrada-Fuentes is an Early Career Fellow at the Institute of Advanced Study at the University of Warwick. Her research interests are conflict transformation, peace-building, applied theatre, politics and performance. She has worked with government institutions and NGOs implementing theatre, dance and performance practice in the social reintegration of ex-combatants in Colombia. Her publications include "Performing Bogotá: Memories of an Urban Bombing" (in *Performing Cities*, ed. Nicolas Whybrow, 2014), and "Becoming Citizens: Loss and Desire in the Social Reintegration of Ex-combatants in Colombia" (in *Gendered Citizenship: Manifestations and Performance*, eds. Bishnupriya Dutt, Janelle Reinelt and Shrinkhla Sahai, forthcoming 2017).

